Comments on Driver Distraction When Using In-Vehicle Technologies and Implications for Motorcycle Safety

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"Honestly Officer, I didn't see the Motorcyclist."

"Watch for Motorcycles."

"Share the Road."

"Look Twice, Save a Life."

These are all slogans, or phrases that have been incorporated into motorcycle safety messages over the years; the point being to tell motorists to pay attention to the task of driving and the traffic around them, particularly motorcycles. I'm here today on behalf of the American Motorcyclist Association's 266,000 members, as well as the millions of others who ride motorcycles to direct this message to the telematics industry, academia, government and others involved in the research, development and deployment of In-Vehicle Technologies. Watch For Motorcycles.

Until two years ago, motorcycle crashes and fatalities had dropped steadily for a decade. Over that decade, crashes and fatalities were cut in more than half. However, 1998 saw an 8 percent increase in fatalities, while preliminary figures for 1999 indicate an 11% increase in fatalities. While no research has been conducted to determine the cause or causes of this upswing, it is an historical certainty that driver distraction plays a significant role in motorcycle crashes and fatalities.

In 1998, nearly 1,200, or over half of all motorcycle fatalities, occurred in multi-vehicle crashes. The left hand turn in front of an approaching motorcycle scenario was most predominant accounting for 36 percent of these fatalities.

In addition to multi-vehicle motorcycle crash fatalities, research has indicated that at least a third of single-vehicle motorcycle crash fatalities can be attributed to other vehicles. Whether you call it a near miss, near hit, near collision or phantom vehicle, the bottom line is that a vehicle encroaches on the motorcycle, causing the motorcycle operator to crash. In fact, just two weeks ago an associate editor with Motorcyclist Magazine lost his life in just such a scenario. Following is an excerpt from the *Asheville Citizens Times*:

ASHEVILLE - As a highly experienced rider and motorcycle enthusiast, Greg McQuide raced his Suzuki SV650 at the Willow Springs International Raceway in the Mojave Desert town of Rosamond, Calif., north of his hometown of Hollywood.

It was ironic, then, that the 30-year-old member of the Willow Springs Motorcycle Club and associate editor of Motorcyclist magazine would die during a routine cruise on Interstate 40 Friday evening while in town for the Honda Hoot.

According to Highway Patrol McQuide laid his motorcycle down in the road to avoid being struck by a box-type truck that unexpectedly cut into his lane. When he did, he lost his grip on the bike and slammed into the guardrail, dying almost instantly. Two nurses witnessed the accident and stopped, but were unable to get a pulse.

Troopers and sergeants were making a concerted effort to no avail Saturday to find the red-cab truck with a white box. They checked at least eight trucks matching the description at the WNC Farmers Market on Saturday, but with nothing else to go upon were unsuccessful. There were four witnesses to the accident, although the truck apparently never made contact with the rider. No one got a license plate number of the eastbound truck.

I didn't know Greg personally, but have heard from those that did that he was a great guy and is truly missed. I wonder why the driver of the red truck with a white box didn't see Greg. I suspect he was distracted. It might have been a cell phone or a navigation system. Or perhaps it was something even more common like a newspaper perched in the drivers lap, similar to the one I saw Monday in the lap of the driver of the green Ford Windstar who was 3/4ths in my lane before realizing me and my motorcycle were there. Whatever the source, when distracted drivers and vulnerable road users such as motorcyclists meet, the results are often grave. We believe it is therefore critical that the deployment of in-vehicle technologies be approached with caution and that the needs and impact of all road users to include motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians, be considered thoroughly.

Included in the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) was a revision to the Goals statement of the Intelligent Transportation System. This section was revised to provide that the needs of all road users, specifically mentioning motorcycles, were to be considered in the research and development of ITS systems, of which in-vehicle technologies are a part. From all appearances, motorcycles continue to be widely overlooked by both government and industry. As an example, a review of all the technical papers appearing on the Internet Forum on Driver Distraction, to include NHTSA's paper *Driver Distraction Research: Past, Present and Future*, failed to find motorcycles mentioned even once.

As a regular and increasing part of the traffic mix, it is imperative that research and development of in-vehicle technologies consider motorcycles to insure that deployment does not compromise motorcycle safety. To that end, following are a few recommendations:

The AMA recommends that the deployment of any in-vehicle technologies be accompanied by strong public information and education campaigns, supported by both the government and industry.

Campaigns such as the cellular industry's urging motorists to stop to make calls are a step in the right direction. The integration of safety messages on navigation system visual displays and speech systems should be explored. These messages could be variable, addressing many of the safety concerns associated with distracted drivers to include those of motorcyclists.

In addition, in-vehicle technologies designed to compensate for driver distraction such as automated collision warning systems, or lane-keeping systems, should be thoroughly tested to insure that they are capable of detecting and responding to motorcycles and other vulnerable road users.

NHTSA's current and future in-vehicle technology research should consider all road users, to include motorcycles. For example, the National Advanced Driving Simulator (NADS) project should include motorcycles among simulated traffic, so that driver reactions to motorcycles may be measured.

Driver distraction has always been a serious issue for the motorcycling community. Irresponsible motorist use of cellular phones, the increased presence of navigation systems and forthcoming integration of internet and e-mail access in automobiles combined with the increasing number of motorcyclists and motorists on the road are intuitively a recipe for increased driver distraction and disaster. The AMA urges the cautious, responsible integration of in-vehicle technologies with particular emphasis on minimizing driver distraction.

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